XIX. *Biographical Memoirs of several Norwich Botanists, in a Letter to Alexander MacLeay, Esq. Sec. L.S.*

By James Edward Smith, M.D. F.R.S. P.L.S.

Read January 17, 1804.

DEAR SIR, Norwich, Jan. 14, 1804.

THE recent death of one of my oldest botanical friends, who has long been a Fellow of the Linnean Society, has suggested some recollections to me which may not be altogether uninteresting, and which I beg the favour of you to communicate to the Society.

Mr. John Pitchford, whose name is well known to all who are conversant with the botany of England, died here on the 22d of December 1803, aged 66 years. He had long practised as a surgeon and apothecary in this town and neighbourhood, especially among the catholics, being himself of that persuasion. His moral character and truly christian spirit would have done honour to any church or sect, and he has left five children to lament the loss of a most indulgent father. I could add more on this subject, but his scientific character is more especially my present object.

Mr. Pitchford was the last of a school of botanists in this town, among whom the writings and merits of Linnæus were perhaps more early, or at least more philosophically, studied and appreciated, than in any other part of Britain. Norwich had long, indeed, been conspicuous for the love of plants. A play is extant, called Rhodon and Iris, which was presented at the florist's feast in Norwich, and printed in 1637. The taste for the cultivation of flowers was, probably, imported from Flanders, along with our worsted

worsted manufacture, during the equally unchristian and unwise persecutions of the bloody Philip II. Such an innocent luxury, and so pure a taste, were not unworthy of minds which had turned, with disgust, from the tyranny and foul corruption of their native country. Truth, virtuous liberty, and disinterested science, are congenial, and flourish under the influence of similar circumstances.

The great Sir Thomas Browne, well known by his various learned writings, who died here in 1682, appears not to have neglected botany. The *Salsola fruticosa* was first observed by him on the Norfolk coast. It does not, however, appear that systematic botany was particularly studied in Norwich till towards the latter end of the 18th century. There was indeed a set of botanists, very distinct from the florists, though, like them, mostly in humble life, who amused themselves in herborizing in the country, and who referred their discoveries to the names and descriptions of old English authors, particularly Gerarde and Parkinson, sometimes, perhaps, to Ray. Some of these are still in being, and a Society, founded many years ago, now exists. But the numbers of these, properly called botanists, have always been very inconsiderable compared with the cultivators of fine flowers, who among the journeymen weavers, and other persons employed in the manufacture, are very numerous, and I believe very successful. The long intercourse between this county and Holland has been favourable to their pursuit.

The oldest name I have been able to discover among the botanists is that of Mr. Wilson, a tailor, who made frequent journeys to London about the years 1738 and 1740. Part of his Herbarium, very scientifically named, has fallen into my hands. From thence it appears that he collected and dried many plants from the Physic Garden at Chelsea, and from Gray's nursery at Fulham. Among his

his pupils were Mr. Christopher Smart, of the same profession, and Mr. Christopher Newman, a man in a more elevated situation in life, both living in my time; as well as Mr. William Humfrey. To the latter, an amiable and communicative man, I have many obligations. He first discovered the *Lycoperdon phalloides* of Mr. Woodward, the *Batarrea* of Persoon, a most singular fungus, not known out of this neighbourhood. I shall mention only one more of these humble cultivators of science, Mr. Joseph Fox, a weaver, of whom mention is made in the 2d volume of our Transactions, p. 315, as the first person who ever raised a *Lycopodium* from seed. He is still living, at a very advanced age, and, without much help from books, has as discriminative a knowledge of our wild plants as most botanists who have made a noise in the world.

"The short and simple annals" of these humble and disinterested admirers of Nature may seem perhaps scarcely worthy the attention of the learned and accomplished naturalist; but those who have the best claim to such a denomination will feel most interest in the success of their fellow labourers, how far soever below their own. It appeared to me unjust to pass over in silence those whose taste at least, and perhaps their knowledge, first excited to similar pursuits the more distinguished botanists of whom I am now to speak.

Some time about the year 1764, if I remember rightly, the Rev. Henry Bryant, at that period one of the ministers of the principal parish here, took up the study of botany as an amusement to his mind after the death of a beloved wife. He was a man of singular acuteness, well skilled in the mathematics, and sufficiently master of his time to devote a considerable portion of it to his new pursuit. He was acquainted with Mr. Hugh Rose, then resident as an apothecary in Norwich, who had always had a taste for botany, and with much classical learning, added to a

systematic and physiological turn of mind, was well qualified to assist Mr. Bryant in the study he had undertaken. Mr. Rose, however, educated in Scotland, was chiefly acquainted with Ray and Tournefort. The famous Dr. Garden was his fellow-student, who, when settled in America, and engaged in studying the plants of that country by the principles of Tournefort, was, as he himself told me, very near giving up the study altogether, for want of a more comprehensive system. Fortunately the works of Linnæus came into his hands, and the use he made of them is well known. Perhaps about the same period our two Norwich botanists first met with the *Philosophia Botanica*. Both of them have often related to me, with singular pleasure, the impression they received from this book. At first they scarcely knew what opinion to form of it. Mr. Rose was not, I believe, without apprehension of some lurking heresies and unfounded novelties, hostile to the fame of his admired Ray; but Mr. Bryant, unattached to any previous system, and much attracted by the mathematical precision of the new book, after reading it again and again, became a decided Linnæan, in which his friend soon most heartily coincided with him. They procured as soon as possible all the other principal writings of Linnæus, as well as the *Flora Anglica* of Mr. Hudson. Mr. Pitchford, then a student of physic in London, was acquainted with this gentleman, and by his mediation a correspondence began between Mr. Hudson and Mr. Rose, which lasted as long as the latter lived. Mr. Pitchford in 1769 settled in Norwich, and added much to the strength of its botany. Mr. Rose in 1775 published his *Elements of Botany*, a translation and epitome of many of the most useful introductory and theoretical writings of Linnæus. In an appendix to this volume some new British plants, found about Norwich by Mr. Pitchford, Mr. Humfrey, and others, are figured and described. Mr. Rose, like Mr. Hudson,

Hudson, transcribed synonyms very copiously without seeing the original books; but that practice has been universal among local botanists till very lately, and, however disgraceful now, was much more excusable when Mr. Rose wrote. The principal part of his work is highly valuable, full of solid information, and not superseded by any other English publication.

I can never forget the kind assistance I received from this worthy man, when, having always had a passion for plants, I became desirous, at the age of 18, of studying botany as a science. The only book I could then procure was Berkenhout, Hudson's *Flora* having become extremely scarce. I received Berkenhout on the 9th of January 1778, and on the 11th began, with infinite delight, to examine the *Ulex europæus*, the only plant then in flower. I then first comprehended the nature of systematic arrangement and the Linnæan principles, little aware that at that instant the world was losing the great genius who was to be my future guide, for Linnæus died in the night of January 11th 1778. With Berkenhout and a parcel of wild flowers in my hands, I had often recourse to Mr. Rose during the ensuing summer. But, alas! in the following year a gutta serena deprived him of his sight. This affliction, so peculiarly severe to a naturalist, he bore with exemplary patience; for though with the loss of his external visual organs he lost his darling amusement, none could ever derive more consolation than himself from looking within. During the few remaining years of Mr. Rose's life, his delight was to assist young people in their classical or botanical studies, and he was always attended by some one or other eager to profit of his conversation. He had long formed the plan of a popular work on the uses of plants; and though unable to execute his intention altogether himself, he suggested the scheme to Mr. Charles Bryant, brother to the gentleman above mentioned, an excellent and industrious

practical botanist. This was the origin of the *Flora Dietetica*, published in 1783. It was dedicated to Mr. Crowe, who had for some years, as well as several other gentlemen of Norwich, embraced with ardour the study of British botany. The Rev. Mr. Bryant was by this time settled at his living of Heydon; from whence he afterwards removed to Colby in Norfolk, where he died at an advanced age in 1799, having never experienced any diminution of his fondness for botanical pursuits. Mr. Hudson and Mr. Lightfoot were, as long as they lived, his constant correspondents. Mr. Charles Bryant died before his brother.

Mr. Pitchford, therefore, was the only survivor of the original Linnæan school of Norwich. He had also been a frequent correspondent of the authors of the *Flora Anglica* and *Flora Scotica*. But though an admirer of Linnæus, he was always peculiarly partial to Ray; and though ever so well acquainted with a plant by its Linnæan name, he could never rest while any obscurity enveloped it in the works of Ray. The *Carices* and *Menthæ* more particularly engaged Mr. Pitchford's attention; and it must be confessed the study of them on his plan, of scrutinizing synonyms without access to any old English herbarium, was not soon to be exhausted. No wonder, therefore, that his conversation and epistolary correspondence on these subjects found no end. Nothing, however, could be more candid and amicable than his discussions. In the last interview I had with him, he was particularly strenuous with me to separate the *Mentha hirsuta*, with capitate flowers, from the verticillate, *M. sativa*. I think it but just to record the opinion of so indefatigable a practical observer, though my own remains unshaken. As some years have now elapsed since the Linnean Society published my paper on Mints, I take this opportunity of observing, that subsequent experience has strongly confirmed the solidity of the characters taken from the pubescence

cence of the calyx and flower-stalk, and I find botanists in general can now, easily enough, make out any mint that comes in their way. On this point, indeed, my late friend was sufficiently disposed to be partial to me, as he always was in every instance in which he could give me credit, or do me any service. A very few days after the above conversation

> ——————————" he gave
> His blessed part to Heav'n, and slept in peace.
> So may he rest! his faults lie gently on him !"

I wish the foregoing particulars may afford the Society any entertainment, and am always,

Dear Sir,

Your faithful friend

And very obedient servant,

J. E. SMITH.

XX. *Further*